

Saudi halts Guinea, Liberia pilgrim visas over Ebola

April 1 2014

Saudi Arabia on Tuesday announced the suspension of visas for Muslim pilgrims from Guinea and Liberia, two African countries hit by an outbreak of the deadly Ebola epidemic.

The "preventive" measure came at the request of the Saudi health ministry "due to the danger of the disease and its highly contagious" nature, state news agency SPA reported.

The World Health Organisation has said it is not recommending travel or trade restrictions to Guinea, Liberia, or to Sierra Leone, which has reported suspected cases of Ebola, based on information currently available.

Once a year Muslims perform the hajj pilgrimage to the Saudi city of Mecca, home to Islam's holiest sites, but they can make the minor umrah pilgrimage to the kingdom all year round.

Medical aid organisation Doctors Without Borders said Monday that the Ebola outbreak suspected of killing at least 78 people in Guinea since January was an "unprecedented epidemic" that had spread across the west African nation.

Guinean health authorities have recorded 122 suspected cases and 78 deaths.

The tropical virus leads to haemorrhagic fever, causing muscle pain,

weakness, vomiting, diarrhoea and, in severe cases, organ failure and unstoppable bleeding.

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